

SOME THOUGHTS ON FICTITIOUS ENTITIES*

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1 FICTIONALITY AND LITERARINESS

1.1 Circulus vitiosus in definiendo

Literature is often characterized in terms of fictionality:

- (i) those texts are defined as belonging to literature which refer to fictitious worlds.

On the other hand, fictionality is often characterized by its occurrence in literature:

- (ii) those texts are defined as referring to a fictitious world which belong to literature.

To claim both at the same time leads to a vicious circle. Instead, one should choose either the former or the former or the latter definition.

1.2 Definitional equivalences

The following definitions state both the necessary and the sufficient condition for literariness (Df.1) or fictionality (Df. 2):

Df.1. x belongs to literature = Df^x refers to a fictitious world;

Df.2. x refers to a fictitious world = Df^x belongs to literature.

1.3 Partial definitions

Suppose, however, that somebody understands (i) and (ii) in a weaker way:

Df.3. If x refers to a fictitious world x belongs to literature;

Df.4. If x belongs to literature, x refers to a fictitious world.

As far as Df.1. and Df.2. are concerned, one should know what it is to say about x that x refers to a fictitious world. And in the case of Df.2. and Df.4. - what it is to say about x that x belongs to literature. If he does not know the answers the definitions fall into the category of *ignotum per ignotum* for him.

1.4 Kinds of reference in literary texts

I am not going to accept any of the definitions given above, although I acknowledge that each of them contains a *particulam veri*. Certainly, expressions referring to fictitious entities do occur in literature and, certainly, the mode of their reference, in particular the fictitious one, does depend on their context of use. But it is far from clear what relation holds between literariness and fictionality; and one reason for this is that both the concept of literature and the concept of fictionality need to be made more precise. To analyse the former is the business of the theorist of literature. I shall limit myself to a few remarks on the latter.

2 ON WHAT THERE ISN'T

2.1 The term 'fictitious' with reference to extralinguistic entities and to expressions

The main difference between the meanings of the term 'fictitious' is connected with the fact that the adjective in question is sometimes applied to a linguistic entity

and on other occasions to non-linguistic ones. Thus we have fictional terms, sentences or texts, and, on the other hand, fictitious objects, events or phenomena.

2.2 Non-existent entities

2.2.1. Subsistence and intentionality

When is a non-linguistic entity said to be fictitious? The answer found most often is: whenever the entity does not really exist, but, nevertheless, is being thought of, it constitutes an intentional object of somebody's desire, belief, dream, idea, etc. Some philosophers say that fictitious objects do not exist but subsist only, and that existence and subsistence are two kinds of being.

2.2.2. The kinds of non-existence

On closer analysis, it appears that among those non-existent entities some distinctions can be made.

2.2.2.1. Absolute and relative non-existence

An entity does not exist, in the absolute way, iff it has never existed and will never exist, e.g., Apollo. An entity does not exist at time t , in the relative way, iff it does not actually exist but, e.g., Napoleon Bonaparte, it either existed, or, e.g., a next-week issue of a daily newspaper, will exist.

2.2.2.2. Non-existent objects and non-existent events

Individual non-existent objects and/or persons, e.g., a magic carpet, a carnivorous cow, can be distinguished from non-existent events and/or phenomena, e.g., and earthquake in Warsaw in May, 1979, or the marriage of Hamlet and Lady Macbeth.

Notice, however, that when somebody contests the right of the latter to exist he does it sometimes for a different reason than in the case of objects. Namely he assumes that *to exist* means *to be an individual object, cognizable through senses*. If, in such a case, events, as different from concrete individual things, are said to be fictitious, fictitiousness is not opposed to being real or being factual but rather to being a physical object.

2.2.3. On a classification of non-existent entities

The two divisions presented in (2.2.2.1) intersect to form the following classification of the entities which happen to be called, by different authors, fictitious in various senses of the term:

ENTITIES KIND OF NON-EXISTENCE	INDIVIDUAL OBJECTS AND/OR PERSONS	EVENTS AND/OR PHENOMENA
ABSOLUTE NON-EXISTENCE	1 /see Table 1/	3 /see Tables 3 a-c/
RELATIVE NON-EXISTENCE	2 /see Table 2/	4 /see Tables 4 a-b/

Table O: Non-existent entities

2.2.4. Non-existent objects

2.2.4.1. Absolutely non-existent objects

P O S S I B L E	/1/ LOGICALLY	Sherlock Holmes
	/2/ PHYSICALLY	The present king of France
	/3/ PRACTICALLY	-
I M P O S S I B L E	/1/ LOGICALLY	An apple totally red and at the same time totally green. The king of a republic.
	/2/ PHYSICALLY	A carnivorous cow. Apollo. An apple of 100 pounds of weight
	/3/ PRACTICALLY	The present king of France. A tarpaulin for the Sun.

Table 1: Absolutely non-existent individual objects and/or persons

Logically possible, above, means *consistent*, *non-contradictory*; *physically possible* means *in agreement with natural laws*; *practically possible* means *one that can be made*. All those terms, however, should be taken *cum grano salis*, i.e., we should remember that they, all of them, refer to absolutely non-existent objects. It follows that the physical possibility of a given object does not involve the possibility of its coming to existence in the future. If we say that something, e.g. a certain object, is physically possible in this strange sense we mean that it is in agreement with such natural laws as, for instance, the law of gravitation, in spite of the fact that the object under discussion does not exist. Only on this assumption can we say here that practical possibility implies physical pos-

sibility, and the latter in turn, implies logical possibility.

Let me make a comment on some of the examples.

The space for practical possibility has been left blank and empty, because, if something is practically possible, in the sense adopted here, it may occur in the future, and, therefore, belongs to relatively non-existent objects.

Is the present king of France a physically possible non-existent object, or rather a logically impossible one? This depends upon the meaning we assign to the proper name *France*. If we understand by it the French territory and nation, then it is physically possible for France to become a kingdom and for somebody to become its king; if, however, *France* is construed as *the French republic*, then the present king of France would be included in the category of logically impossible non-existent entities. Analogous arguments might be applied to the examples of physical impossibility.

I fully realize that the examples shown in Table 1 may appear controversial. More important, however, than this or that way of assigning examples to the categories distinguished in the above table are the categories themselves that we have obtained as the result of our classification. Their occurrence points to the fact that many various kinds of thing are included in the class of absolutely non-existent individual objects and, consequently, that different kinds of things and persons are sometimes called fictitious.

2.2.4.2. Relatively non-existent objects

Section 2 of Table 0 above consists of two categories: the category of past individuals and the category of future individuals, as represented in Table 2.

PAST	Aristotle
FUTURE	The cathedral at Chartres in 1990

Table 2: Relatively non-existent individual objects and/or persons

2.2.5. Non-existent events

2.2.5.1. Absolutely non-existent events

Section 3 of Table 0, encompassing absolutely non-existent events and/or phenomena will be represented in Table 3 a-c

ABSOLUTELY NON-EXISTENT EVENTS AND/OR PHENOMENA					
POSSIBLE			IMPOSSIBLE		
LOGICALLY	PHYSICALLY	PRACT.	LOGICALLY	PHYSICALLY	PRACTICALLY
The appointment of Warsaw in 1978 as the seat of the central East-European Left-Luggage Office	The eruption of Vesuvius in May, 1979	-	The state of affairs consisting in Capri's being both higher and lower than Anacapri	The eruption of Aventine Hill	The covering of the Sun with a tarpaulin

Table 3a: Absolutely non-existent events and/or phenomena in which existent individual things and/or persons occur

EVENT OB- JECT			ABSOLUTELY NON-EXISTENT EVENTS AND/OR PHENOMENA					
			POSSIBLE			IMPOSSIBLE		
			LOGIC.	PHYSIC.	PRAC.	LOGICALLY	PHYSICALLY	PRACTICALLY
ABSOLUTELY NON-EXISTENT INDIVIDUAL OBJECTS	P O S S I B L E	L O G I C .	To shave the present king of France = /A/	To shave Sherlock Holmes = /B/	-	To kill Sherlock Holmes twice = /E/	The meeting of Hamlet with Sherlock Holmes = /F/	The meeting of Sherlock Holmes with Galdstone = /G/
		P H Y S I C .	/A/	/A/	-	/E/	/F/	/G/
		P R A C .	-	-	-	-	-	-
	I M P O S S I B L E	L O G I C .	To shave the king of a republic = /C/	To peel an apple totally red and totally green = /H/	-	That a king of a republic utters a sentence in two different lang. at t. /K/	To dissolve a totally red and totally green apple in water = /N/	To feed one million persons with a small totally red and totally green apple = /R/
		P H Y S I C .	To shave Apollo = /D/	To milk a carnivorous cow = /I/	-	To milk a carnivorous cow and to leave it totally un milked at the same time = /L/	To keep a carnivorous cow under water = /O/	That Apollo speaks American English = /S/
		P R A C T I C .		To wash a tarpaulin for the Sun = /J/		To kill the present king of France twice = /M/	To dissolve the present king of France in water = /P/	That the present king of France delivers his speech from the throne in American English = /T/

Table 3b: Absolutely non-existent events and/or phenomena in which absolutely non-existent objects and/or persons occur

EVENTS		ABSOLUTELY NON-EXISTENT EVENTS AND/OR PHENOMENA					
		POSSIBLE			IMPOSSIBLE		
		LOGIC.	PHYSIC.	PRAC.	LOGICALLY	PHYSICALLY	PRACTICALLY
RELATIVELY NON-EXISTENT OBJECTS	FUTURE	That there will be only one planet revolving round the Sun tomorrow	That Michelin will publish a guidebook to the Moon in August 1979		To become a son of one's own daughter to be born in a year	To drink today the wather which will flow from this source in 1990	To install acoustic detecting apparatus in all birds' nets in 1980
	PAST	That Aristotle shaved himself with an electric shaver	That Aristotle is an author of a guidebook to Athens		That Aristotle is an author <i>unius libelli</i> and at the same time of all his philosophical writings	That Aristotle spoke American English	That Aristotle discussed philosophical problems with the Emperor of China of his time

Table 3c: Absolutely non-existent events and/or phenomena in which relatively non-existent objects and/or persons occur

2.2.5.2. Relatively non-existent events

Section 4 of Table 0 includes relatively non-existent events and/or phenomena. These can be divided according to what kinds of objects occur in them: existent /4a/ or relatively non-existent /4b/.

EVENTS OBJECTS	RELATIVELY NON-EXISTENT EVENTS AND/OR PHENOMENA	
	PAST	FUTURE
EXISTENT INDIVIDU- AL OB- JECTS	The eruption of Vesuvius which destroyed Pompei	To morrow's sunrise

Table 4a: Relatively non-existent events and/or phenomena
in which existent individual objects and/or
persons occur

EVENTS OBJECTS	RELATIVELEY NON-EXISTENT EVENTS AND/OR PHENOM- ENA	
	PAST	FUTURE
R E L A T I V E L Y N O N E X I S T E N T		To-morrow's sunrise
	The birth of Aristotle	

Table 4b: Relatively non-existent events and/or phenomena
in which relatively non-existent objects and/or
persons occur

Please pay no attention to the examples in the tables above. I know that the examples are silly. And I do not insist on those particular that have been given. What is important is the general idea reflected in the tables. The idea is certainly controversial, and I am fully aware of

the fact. Can, for instance, an event be possible in spite of the fact that some impossible objects contribute to its occurrence? But, on the other hand, is it really impossible, in a kind of a so-called literary world, to peel a self-contradictory apple?

2.3 Fictitious entities

As we have seen, both absolutely and relatively non-existent *possibilia* and *impossibilia*, and, among them, both objects and events, are on various occasions considered fictitious.

2.3.1. The meanings of 'fictitious' used with reference to entities

Fictitiousness is predicated of the various entities for a number of different reasons, which is tantamount to saying that there are many opposites to the adjective *fictitious* when it qualifies some entity. The opposites are: *existent*, *actually existent*, *factual*, *being an empirical object cognizable through senses*, *possible*.

2.3.2. Kinds of texts referring to fictitious entities

Certainly it is not literature alone that is concerned with fictitious entities. Philosophers speak of circular squares, logicians - of the present king of France, physicists of an ideal gas: all these entities are absolutely non-existent, and at least some of them are sometimes called fictitious. Everyday life, with its expectations, beliefs, suspicions, desires, dreams, suppositions, and assumptions, provides numerous examples of referring to non-existent objects and events. History speaks of past events, scientific prognoses - of future ones: all of them are relatively non-existent. It seems that there is scarcely any kind of non-existent entity that could be pointed to as

occurring solely in literature, and also scarcely any kind of non-existent entity that would not once be called fictitious.

2.3.3. The concept of possible world

This being the case some scholars look for help to modal logics and try to use the nowadays fashionable concept of possible world as the last and only resort. Instead of saying that fictional texts refer to fictitious - in one of the meanings of the term - objects or events they maintain that the texts have whole worlds as their counterparts. Some authors try to prove that fictional texts speak of possible worlds (Eco, 1978: 29), while some others claim that the texts cannot refer to possible worlds, because it is characteristic of literary fictionality that it is directed to impossible entities (Woods, 1974: 76).

Oddly enough, the concept of possible world - at least so it seems to me - had been taken by the logicians from nowhere else but traditional considerations on literature where that loose, but suggestive and vivid, metaphor of a poetic or literary world used to appear in discussions concerning literary characters. The logicians, most probably following Leibniz, have subjected the traditional concept of imaginary world to modifications which have resulted in the concept, or rather concepts, of possible worlds. The concepts, as different from that of the poetic or literary world, are better adapted to special logical needs, for instance, to the requirements of the analysis of reasoning. But it does not follow that they meet equally well the needs of literary sciences. To answer the special purposes of literary-analysis the boomeranging concept of possible world should be redefined with these new aims in mind. Before, however, it has been done, literary theorists should make up their mind whether they really need a concept of *possible* world to speak of both possible and impossible

entities referred to in literature, and whether, they prefer to have one such concept for all the different kinds of prose and poetry of rather various concepts, each of them designed for a particular kind of literature, for instance, one for realistic novels, another for the phantastic ones.

2.3.4. Language and the fictitiousness of entities

To account for the variety of kinds of non-existent entities, when at least some of them are being considered fictitious, one should realize to what extent it is language itself that imposes the distinctions between them. This is why, I think, we should pay attention not so much to the fictitious entities themselves as rather to fictional expressions, or, to be more precise, to such uses of expressions in which they become fictional. Fictionality is relative: with regard to a given verbal and situational context.

Note

- * Professor J. Pelc read a rather extensive lecture in our working group in Vienna, however since that time his conception and terminology of fictionality have so fundamentally changed that we can publish here the introductory part of his study but we have to change his original terminology according to his new thesis: instead of the predicate "fictional" we have two terms: "fictitious" and "fictional". This change in terminology has theoretical reasons: "I have accepted the following terminology: FICTITIOUS PERSONS, THINGS, ANIMALS, and FICTIONAL EXPRESSIONS, SENTENCES, TEXTS." (J Pelc: Letter to Z. Kanyó, 15th November 1982.) Professor Pelc is working on